



A Milner Hall resident on bended knee while citing the hall pledge at a debate on changing the name of Milner Hall, at the Main Salon of the Office of the Campus Principal, UWI St Augustine.
PICTURE CHARLES KONG SOO

Heat over Milner Hall name change

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The atmosphere was charged at the Main Salon of the Office of the Campus Principal, UWI St Augustine a week ago, where a debate on changing the name of Milner Hall was held.

Alfred Milner, who the hall was named after, has been accused of committing crimes against humanity. UWI Vice Chancellor Prof Sir Hilary Beckles asked members of the audience if they were willing to celebrate peoples such as Milner, a war criminal.

Beckles said "Lord Milner is known for his violent military assault upon the South African people, the Zulus especially.

He is also known for his assault on people of Asia, which he organised to go to South Africa to replace South Africans and put them in the mines where their mortality rate didn't matter as they were just 'coolies'."

Near the end of the meeting, the majority of Milner Hall students who wanted to keep the Milner name but discard his legacy shouted out their hall name like a war chant.

Cross Rhodes Freedom Project (CRFP) Director Shabaka Kambon had to use a ruse to get the microphone from Yarley Mendez who was the last person allowed to speak.

Kambon said he saw African and Indian students put their hands over their

hearts and chant the name of a man who was the equivalent of Hitler to the Jews.

He said the South Africans were now working on bringing charges against Milner posthumously because of the crimes he committed there.

A brief history of the call to rename Milner Hall

Addressing an orientation ceremony for new students at the Cave Hill Campus in Barbados in September, Beckles said that it was unconscionable for the name of Alfred Milner to remain in a place of honour, on a UWI campus as the university enters its 70th year as an independent Caribbean institution. He insisted his name must go.

Over the last year, CRFP held several consultations with university students, including one with Milner Hall residents, to come up with an acceptable name change by all parties. The Father of Pan Africanism Trinidadian lawyer Henry Sylvester Williams (1869-1911) has been put forward by CRFP.

The group has two other local campaigns currently running in tandem with the renaming of Milner Hall at UWI St Augustine—the removal of a sign in Lopinot, at the historical site of a former slave plantation and the removal of the Columbus statue in Moruga.

The appointed British High Commissioner to Cape Colony (South Africa) in the late 1890s, Lord Viscount Alfred Milner, close collaborator of Cecil John Rhodes, one of the people who helped prepare the way for apartheid by working to alter laws on voting and land ownership, quickly provoked the Second Boer War (1899-1902) to seize control of the richest colony in Africa for Britain.